

All About Us: The Way We Live in Montgomery

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At this time of economic uncertainty, people worry not only about what will happen to their families, but also their neighborhoods, schools, and places of residence. How much do you worry about your city?

More importantly, how many people in your city are struggling to make ends meet? How many live alone? How many live with other people such as spouses, children, and other relatives? How many people have jobs? How far do they commute to work? How do they get there?

The Center for Demographic Research at Auburn University at Montgomery will be examining the socio-demographic characteristics of residents of major metropolitan areas in Alabama to help Alabamians learn more about their own people in order to understand how their populations are coping with the current economic downfall. This first report on the way we live in Alabama cities focuses on the state capital, Montgomery.

With a population currently estimated at 204,006 people, the city of Montgomery is the second largest urban agglomeration in the state, after Birmingham. Who are these people? The majority of Montgomery residents were born in the state of Alabama (71.4%), and many are living in the same house they lived in one year ago (80.6%).

There are approximately 7,560 foreign-born people, representing 3.6 percent of the city's population. Nearly one in three foreign-born people in the city of Montgomery is a naturalized U.S. citizen. These figures are similar to the state immigration statistics.

Montgomery residents live in some 80,391 households in the city of Montgomery, with an average household size of 2.41 people. Most of the households are composed of family members (62.8%); families with children under age 18 account for 28.1 percent of households. Married-couple families represent 37.3 percent of the households. The average family size is 3.1, which is almost identical to the state and national averages.

Forty-six percent of Montgomery male residents age 15 and older are married compared to only 36.8 percent of women in the same age category. This gender difference in marital status is largely due to a skewed sex ratio (83 men per 100 women age 15 and older). As such, more than half of births occur outside marriage (59.1%), a figure that is higher than the corresponding state (41.2%) and national (33.5%) levels.

With this high level of out-of-wedlock births, more and more grandparents are taking care of their grandchildren. In the city of Montgomery alone, 51 percent of grandparents live with their grandchildren under age 18. In some cases, these grandparents also take

care of their own children. Many of these “extended families” are having a hard time coping with the current economy crisis.

Nonetheless, Montgomery residents are relatively more educated than the state population. Thirty-two percent of Montgomery residents age 25 years and older have at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 21.4 percent of Alabamians and 27.5 percent of the U.S. population. Despite this higher educational attainment, Montgomery residents are experiencing job loss like other cities in the nation.

According to recent statistics from the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations, the city’s unemployment rate increased from 3.7 percent in December 2007 to 6.5 percent in December 2008. Most Montgomery residents work in educational services, health care, and social assistance (20.0%) and in retail trade (12.0%). Any downsizing in these industries will automatically affect thousands of people.

In terms of type of occupation, a large number of residents are in professional and managerial jobs (35%), followed by sales and office occupations (26%), services (17%), and production, transportation and material moving occupations (14%). All other occupations account for only 8 percent of the workforce.

Most workers who live in the City of Montgomery drive alone to work (82.9%); only a small number carpool (11.5%). Despite traffic congestion observed during rush hours, more than half (59.1%) of residents who drive to work spend less than 20 minutes on the road.

What group of residents is most affected by the current economic recession in the city? It depends on household income, size, and structure; place of residence within the city; distance to place of work; and other factors that determine the individual’s socio-economic status.

There are great disparities in income, housing, and other factors that affect living conditions across the city. For example, the median family income varies greatly among the 52 census tracts in the City of Montgomery from the lowest value of \$13,384 to the highest value of \$120,262, with a city average of \$53,639 in 2008. In some census tracts more than 65 percent of the people are below the poverty line, whereas the corresponding figure is only about 1 percent in the most affluent tracts.

Knowing your community and its people is important, especially during this time of economic uncertainties. Learning more about your city and your neighborhood will help you to adapt to the socio-demographic challenges of our time and will help you make better strategic survival decisions.

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